

Anita and Abhishek's journey of resilience and building a home: an emphasis on family strengthening efforts, community-based child care services, and consistent follow-ups



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Background

*All names have been changed to maintain confidentiality**

Abhishek, a 13-year-old boy resides with his mother, Anita, in Mumbai. This case was referred to Prerana's Unnati Project in June 2023 to conduct a social investigation after Anita had approached the Child Welfare Committee(CWC) to admit Abhishek to a Children's Home.

During the initial interactions with the family, it was found that Anita had spent most of her life living on the streets. Abhishek's father was alcohol-dependent and passed away due to liver damage. Abhishek also had an older brother named Akash. After the death of their father, both the boys were placed in different Children's Homes (CHs). Abhishek was only 6 years old at that time. Unfortunately, in 2022, Akash (aged 16) died

by suicide while he was residing in the CH. The social worker contacted the CH regarding the same and they corroborated the information. Abhishek had lived in the CH for seven years until he turned 12 in June 2023 which was the age limit for children living there. The Child Welfare Officer facilitated Abhishek's case presentation before the CWC, who restored him to Anita. Anita had been working as a Janitor in a hospital for a monthly salary



of INR 10,000. Anita had been working as a Janitor in a hospital for a monthly salary of INR 10,000. However, after Akash's death, Anita went through grief, uncertainty and depression. She lost her job and she wasn't employed for about a year. In 2020, Abhishek was diagnosed with epilepsy while at the CH and had to be taken to the local hospital for treatment. Post his restoration, Anita had to ensure he ate nutritious food, constantly monitor his health, and purchase additional medicines from a private medical shop.



However, it became increasingly difficult for her to manage. She felt unable to seek employment due to her caregiving responsibilities towards Abhishek and existing emotional distress. Compounding these challenges, the family faced ongoing issues with the local authorities regarding illegal housing and the constant evictions.

Anita and Abhishek used to sleep on two metal barricades and would keep their clothes and important documents in a nearby shop. During the monsoon of July 2023, Abhishek started falling ill frequently, and was later hospitalised. Anita also did not want Abhishek to live on the streets due to safety concerns about potential bullying, vulnerability of abuse and the risk of falling into negative peer influences. Since Abhishek wasn't enrolled in school and would spend the day living on the streets, she had approached the CWC to re-institutionalise Abhishek. It was at this point that the CWC referred their case to Prerana to **conduct a social investigation**.

Prerana Interventions

During the social investigation visit in July 2023, the social workers interacted with Abhishek to understand his desires and assess his needs comprehensively. The team observed that Abhishek was very quiet and only responded to close-ended questions. However, he expressed his desire to attend school and not live on the streets. After the SIR was submitted to the CWC in July 2023, the CWC issued a **follow-up order** for Prerana to support Abhishek and Anita.

Throughout the initial month of follow-up, the team tried to build a rapport with Anita and Abhishek.

Anita felt her life was at a standstill due to the lack of any employment opportunities, and the emotional and mental breakdown following Akash's demise. She still considered re-institutionalisation as the only resort for Abhishek. At this stage, the social workers from Prerana discussed with her about the principle of family responsibility and about a child's right to family-based care for their holistic development. Anita then expressed a desire for Abhishek to be enrolled in a school and not be - 'just a street child'. The team explained the process of collaboration to them, and



outlined how they, along with Anita and Abhishek, would work together to enrol him to a nearby school. The team also discussed that while Anita attempts to re-enter the workforce and search for opportunities, they can explore options for a community-based support system, such as day-care centers, where Abhishek could go after school hours.

The team started mapping day-care centres, and simultaneously helped Abhishek understand about the day-to-day activities conducted there. After orienting him and receiving his and Anita's consent, the team linked Abhishek to a **day-care center run by Salaam Balak Trust.**

Simultaneously, the team along with Anita and Abhishek visited schools nearby the center and **enrolled him in 6th grade.** The team also informed Anita that she was eligible to avail benefits under the Bal Sangopan Yojana and the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana for widowed person. The team provided her with the required information and briefed her about the application process, including the expected timeline. While living on the streets, Anita was unsure of her ability to care of Abhishek adequately, given the circumstances they were in. The team extended psychosocial and emotional support to her by reminding her of her strength and capabilities, helping her map

out a monthly plan for herself and Abhishek, and supporting her to identify her resilience. The team assured Anita that she could voice her concerns and that they would support and assist her accordingly. The team also assisted in recognizing and mapping her immediate support systems. Over a period of a few months, the team observed Anita **becoming more confident** in navigating the complexities around her life.



Establishing linkages with government and non-government support systems

By the second month of follow-up in August 2023, Abhishek started attending school and the day care center but his attendance was irregular. Whenever he was dropped to the school or day care centre, he appeared anxious and often asked Anita to wait. His anxiety further increased during the initial phase of intervention when he had heard Anita have conversations with multiple stakeholders about re-institutionalising him,

which was not the case anymore. The team recognized the importance of Anita providing reassurance to Abhishek and emphasized the need for her to build a relationship of trust with him. The team also discussed it with Anita who shared that she did not want to reinsititutionalize Abhishek as the current arrangement was working for them. Anita received tips on how she could **communicate effectively with Abhishek**

and understand his feelings expressed through verbal and nonverbal cues. She was also advised to actively listen to him so he feels heard and understood, and to assure him that he will remain with her. The team regularly interacted with Abhishek about his experience at the school and the day-care center, and if he faced any challenges. Eventually with consistent follow-up, the family started trusting and opening up more about their life. The team further assisted Anita to develop a six-month plan for herself and Abhishek which included applying for social security documents, government schemes, finding a job, and moving out from street situation to a rented home. This milestone approach aimed to make Abhishek and Anita more confident and self-reliant. Eventually when Abhishek started attending school and the day care center regularly, Anita became more comfortable with him staying



with her and confident of taking care of his safety and developmental needs.

By the month of September 2023, Anita had started applying for her social security documents like Income Certificate and Domicile Certificate. During this time, the Child Well-Being Fund[1] was released for them under Project Unnati's Sponsorship Support. By November 2023, with some help from the social workers, Anita **had obtained most of the necessary social security documents and opened a bank account for Abhishek.**

She had also received her income and domicile certificates from the Tehsil office. During the process of approaching the Tehsil office and preparing other documents, the team accompanied her in the first few visits to explain the procedures. Anita felt more confident after a few visits and began approaching the Tehsil office and the bank on her own. She became more proactive and took ownership of the process. With the support of the team, she organized the documents and approached the CWC to apply for the **Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Bal Sangopan Yojana (KSP-BSY)**. The CWC referred the case to another organization to assist with further procedures, such as home visits and document verification. While the BSY application was in process, Anita also applied for the **Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana (SGNY)**.



KRANTIYOTI SAVITRIBAI PHULE BAL SANGOPAN YOJANA (KSP-BSY)



The aforementioned scheme is a Maharashtra state scheme which provides monetary assistance of Rs. 2250 to children in cases of a single parent, family in distress, death of parents and children with divorced parents among others.

CHILD WELL-BEING FUND



The Child Well-Being Fund is provided to children who are eligible for the KSP-BSY and bridges the immediate financial need of families living in difficult circumstances till the benefits of the scheme come through. The fund is provided by Prerana to the children.

SANJAY GANDHI NIRADHAR YOJANA



This scheme is applicable to persons of age below 65 years with all types of disabilities, person suffering from critical illness like T. B., cancer, AIDS and leprosy, widows including those of farmers who died by suicide, divorced women and women in process of divorce, women who were in the sex trade etc.

Getting a ‘ghar’

The team observed significant improvement in Anita's ability to navigate the processes for applying for financial support schemes. She secured a janitor's job, and the family moved to a one-room rental house in the outer suburbs of Mumbai. When the team visited their house for the first time, Anita happily showed them around along with the photo frames that she had put on the walls of her house. Anita told the team,

"Jab main pehele kisi ko bhi mere ghar pe bulati thi, toh mujhe bohot sharam aata kyu ki mere pass kuch nahi tha, main raste pe rehti thi. Par ab jab mera ghar hai, mujhe bohot garv hota hai jab mei kisi ko bhi ghar bulati hu".

("When I used to invite someone to my home before, I felt very ashamed because I had nothing and I lived on the streets. But now that I have a home, I feel very proud when I invite anyone over.")

Anita again started working as a Janitor earning INR 10,000 and additionally **the family started receiving money from both the government schemes: KSP-BSY and SGNV.** After they shifted to their new home, Abhishek

was linked to Prerana's Aashiyana Project which works on family-strengthening in the M-ward area; **he now attends Aashiyana's community-center regularly.** Abhishek attended his previous school till the end of the academic year and was enrolled at a school close to Aashiyana's community-center from the next academic year. As the community centre was easily accessible from his house and school, Anita could go to work without worrying about Abhishek's safety and well-being. After almost a year, the team continues to have telephonic conversations and in-person follow-up with the family. Moving forward, the team shall assist Anita to open a public provident fund account for financial savings, prepare E-shram Card etc.

**The Government of India started the e-Shram yojana to provide social security such as a pension after 60 years, death insurance, financial aid in case of incapacity, etc. to workers in unorganised sectors.*



Key Outcomes



Abhishek linked to a day-care center



Abhishek re-enrolled in school and Anita re-linked to a job opportunity



Enhanced confidence of Anita in navigating the complexities around her life



Deeper understanding of how Anita could communicate effectively with Abhishek



Anita obtained social security documents and opened a bank account for Abhishek



Anita & Abhishek started receiving money from the government schemes: BSY and SGNY



Anita and Abhishek moved to a rental house



Abhishek now attends a community-center regularly

A Journey from Life in Street Situation to Stability

Prerana's work with the family has been a continual process, through coordination with the various stakeholders involved. The family strengthening and gatekeeping component of Unnati holds significance in this case as a preventative measure to keep the child from re-entering institutional care and encourage family and community-based alternative care. The family was provided with material and non-material support, including psycho social support, to strengthen Anita's ability as a primary care giver and support her to move out from street situation to living in a rented place.

Anita was not very confident and was fearful due to her previous experiences of grief and depression. However, consistent support and follow-up led her to be more proactive, confident and willing to work towards the betterment of her and Abhishek's future. All that Anita needed was, information, handholding, support and a nudge.

In this case particularly what worked well was the resources available such as daycare centre, and the community centre which were quality oriented, affordable and easily accessible from both his school and house. Financial assistance is another component which enabled Anita to take care of Abhishek's immediate needs and empowered her to apply for documents, enroll him in school and day-care center, and explore job opportunities simultaneously.

Regular/consistent follow-up, check-ins also helped the team build a rapport and a trusting relationship with the family which further enabled them to fully participate and take ownership of the interventions.

Project Unnati aims to strengthen families and reduce the need for institutional care. It emphasizes the importance of supporting families and reassure caregivers that they can overcome challenges, by

simultaneously building family resilience through linkages with different support systems, and empowering them to care for and support the child. These measures are aimed at ensuring that children grow up in a family environment and are not deprived of their right to family-based care.



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